US Army Corps of Engineers®
Memphis District

Birds Point New Madrid Floodway

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is the floodway operating as designed?

A: So far, the floodway has operated as designed, meaning that it has relieved pressure on the levee system in the region. This has been shown by continued drops in river gages in the area, especially at Cairo which is a good marker to use in this situation because it is the area generally with the highest pressure being the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. At 10pm Monday night before the Birds Point Levee was intentionally breached, the Cairo gage was at 61.72ft – as of 11am Tuesday the Cairo gage was reading 60.32ft and continuing to lower.

Q: Why is there still flooding?

A: The operation of the floodway is not intended to stop all flooding, rather to relieve pressure on the Mississippi River and Tributaries Flood Risk Reduction System, so as to reduce the risk of levee failures and help reduce the risk to the communities behind those levees in the region. With rain continuing and water levels already surpassing historic levels, there is no way to stop all flooding, but rather to do our best to reduce the risk to life and property in the region.

Q: How long is this going to last?

A: It is important to note that the use of the Birds Point New Madrid Floodway was to provide temporary relief to a flood risk reduction system that is seeing historic water levels and pressure unlike ever before. Following operation of the floodway, Corps experts estimate it will take 45-60 days for water to recede out of the floodway, if the area sees no more rainfall. After the floodway water has receded, it will take another 21-30 days for the land to dry out. Another obstacle will be removing all the debris and sediment deposition that occurred during the flooding. The repercussions of this historic flooding season will be here for a while, but the Corps of Engineers will be here just as long, doing whatever we can to help floodfight and help reduce the risk to communities along

the Mississippi.

Q: Where do I go for help now that I'm flooded?

A: Local authorities. They have resources and information. Residents experiencing flooding and needing emergency assistance, such as evacuation assistance or medical care, should contact local emergency officials in their town or county.

Q: What should e expect to see in the next 24/48/72 hours?

A: While these historic water levels are not expected to go away anytime soon, I can assure you that the Corps of Engineers will be here as long as the waters are, to do our best to ensure the integrity of the flood risk reduction system in the region and to help reduce the risk to life and property in the communities here experiencing this historic flooding event.

Q: How will we know when we can go home?

A: Any updates on evacuation orders and/or the status of towns will be coming directly from local officials and not the Corps of Engineers. We encourage residents to be in close contact with their local officials to stay up to date on issues related specifically to their communities.

Q: Where does water from the Mississippi flow into? Would it flood land downriver where the Corps plans to breach levees for outflow?

A: The Mississippi River Project is managed as a system. Water enters the floodway at Bird's Point and reenter the river east of New Madrid. Upstream of New Madrid, there will be immediate and significant relief to the levee system, all the way to Cairo, Ill., and Paducah, Ky. These levees are seeing significant stress and the drop in water will help significantly. Downstream, the water will continue to rise (remember that water at Cairo didn't go away and still needs to flow downstream). Since we are not adding new water to the system, we can expect the same crests downstream of New Madrid, but the timing may be sooner because the floodway is a shorter path to the Gulf of Mexico. Our levees are designed to contain this expected flow.

Q: Why was water in the floodway before you breached the levee?

A: There is a gap in the frontline and setback levees. We had backwater between the frontline and setback levees all the way north to the town of Pinhook. At 60.5' on the Cairo gage, water will overtop the levee and spill into the floodway, flooding the upper reaches, so the difference is this: with activation of the floodway, the area is flooded and stages lower from Paducah to Hickman; without activation, the stages begin to exceed design conditions and the floodway still gets flooded. Operating outside of the project design is less controlled, and this would put tens of thousands of people behind the levees (who haven't been orderly evacuated) at risk.

Q: What is the impact on Cairo when the floodway is operated?

A: The expected relief is 3-8 feet at Cairo depending on various river conditions.

Q: What is the blasting agent?

A: It is a combination of containing aluminum and sodium perchlorate. 11.3 tons of explosive slurry were pumped into 1000 foot sections of the levee. The detonation would be performed by an explosives team from the Engineering Research and Development Center in Vicksburg, MS.